National Endowment for the Arts

THE BIG READ

TEACHER'S GUIDE

CYNTHIA OZICK'S

The Shawl

INSTITUTE of Museum and Library SERVICES

NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts—both new and established—bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.

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Arts Midwest connects people throughout the Midwest and the world to meaningful arts opportunities, sharing creativity, knowledge, and understanding across boundaries. Based in Minneapolis, Arts Midwest connects the arts to audiences throughout the nine-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. One of six non-profit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest's history spans more than 25 years.

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"The most astounding thing was that the most ordinary streetcar, bumping along on the most ordinary tracks, and carrying the most ordinary citizens going from one section of Warsaw to another, ran straight into the place of our misery. Every day, and several times a day, we had these witnesses."

—from *The Shawl*

National Endowment for the Arts

Introduction

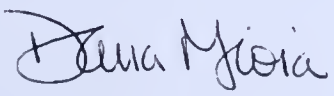
Welcome to the Big Read, a major initiative from the National Endowment for the Arts. Designed to revitalize the role of literary reading in American culture, the Big Read hopes to unite communities through great literature, as well as inspire students to become life-long readers.

This Big Read Teacher's Guide contains ten lessons to lead you through Cynthia Ozick's classic novel, *The Shawl.* Each lesson has four sections: a focus topic, discussion activities, writing exercises, and homework assignments. In addition, we have provided capstone projects and suggested essay topics, as well as handouts with more background information about the novella, the historical period, and the author. All lessons dovetail with the state language arts standards required in the fiction genre.

The Big Read teaching materials also include a CD. Packed with interviews, commentaries, and excerpts from the book, the Big Read CD presents first-hand accounts of why *The Shawl* remains so compelling nearly two decades after its initial publication. Some of America's most celebrated writers, scholars, and actors have volunteered their time to make these Big Read CDs exciting additions to the classroom.

Finally, the Big Read Reader's Guide deepens your exploration with interviews, booklists, timelines, and historical information. We hope this guide and syllabus allow you to have fun with your students while introducing them to the work of a great American author.

From the NEA, we wish you an exciting and productive school year.



Dana Gioia
Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts

Suggested Teaching Schedule

1

Day One

FOCUS: Biography

Activities: Listen to the Big Read CD. Discuss Reader's Guide essays. Write an essay on a career goal or lifetime dream.

Homework: Read the opening story (pp. 3-10) and Handouts One and Two.

2

Day Two

FOCUS: Culture and History

Activities: Discuss essays from the Reader's and Teacher's Guides. Examine Ozick's description of the death camp. Write an essay on whether or not genocide could take place in today's society.

Homework: Read from page 13 until the break on page 39.

3

Day Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

Activities: Discuss the novel's narrative perspective. Write a scene from the first person point-of-view of a character other than Rosa.

Homework: Read from the break on page 39 until the break on page 53.

4

Day Four

FOCUS: Characters

Activities: Read Handout Three. Discuss Stella's letter to Rosa, Simon Persky's role as a foil to Rosa, and the life Rosa invents for Magda. Write three paragraphs considering whether choice is "the only true freedom."

Homework: Finish reading the book.

5

Day Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Activities: Discuss figurative language and the importance of metaphor in Ozick's writing. Analyze the parable of the lettuce on pages 67-69. Write an essay on why Rosa refuses to forget the Holocaust.

Homework: Review the book to find examples of objects that can be considered symbolic.

6

Day Six

FOCUS: Symbols

Activities: Discuss how Magda's shawl and Rosa's underwear function as symbols. Write an essay on what buttons might symbolize to Rosa.

Homework: List Rosa's strengths and weaknesses supporting each trait with a passage from the text.

7

Day Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Activities: Using the list of character traits from the previous night's homework, discuss whether or not Rosa is a sympathetic, heroic protagonist. Analyze Persky's effectiveness as a comic character. Write an essay on the character most highly assimilated to American culture.

Homework: Identify three major turning points in the book.

8

Day Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

Activities: Discuss the book's turning points and what we learn about Rosa during those moments. Outline a sequel to the book.

Homework: Identify three major themes in the book.

9

Day Nine

FOCUS: Themes of the Book

Activities: Discuss themes of Memory/History, Dignity, and Life.

Homework: Begin working on essays.

10

Day Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Great Book?

Activities: Explore the qualities of a great work of fiction.

Homework: Work on essays.

Lesson One

FOCUS: Biography

The author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a work of fiction. One practice of examining a literary work, biographical criticism, looks through the lens of an author's experience. In this lesson, explore the author's life to more fully understand *The Shawl*.

Born in 1928 to a family of Russian immigrants, Cynthia Ozick spent her childhood in the Pelham Bay area of the Bronx. Her parents owned a neighborhood pharmacy. Ozick spent afternoons and evenings reading and re-reading such favorites as classic fairy tales and Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. Acceptance to Hunter College High School in New York, an academically competitive school for young women, gave her the confidence she needed to pursue her goal of becoming a writer.

Discussion Activities

Listen to the Big Read CD. Students should take notes as they listen. Copy and distribute the Reader's Guide essays "Cynthia Ozick" and "An Interview with Cynthia Ozick." Divide the class into two groups. Assign one essay to each group. After reading and discussing the essays, each group will present what they learned. Ask students to add a creative twist to make their presentation memorable.

Writing Exercise

Cynthia Ozick knew from the time she was a very small child that she would be a writer. Have students write a three-paragraph essay on the career they plan to pursue or another goal that will define their lives. When did they first become aware of their desire? Did they find encouragement from family, friends, or teachers? Was there pressure for or against their choice? If so, why? Ask students to consider what provides them with the confidence and discipline needed to achieve their dreams.

Homework

Read the opening short story, "*The Shawl*" (pp. 3-10) and Handouts One and Two. Ask students to make a list of ten adjectives or phrases Ozick uses to describe Rosa's, Magda's, or Stella's experience in the death camp.

Lesson Two

FOCUS: Culture and History

Cultural and historical contexts give birth to the dilemmas and themes at the heart of a work of fiction. Studying these contexts and appreciating the intricate details of the time and place can assist us in comprehending the motivations of the characters. In this lesson, use cultural and historical contexts to begin to explore the book.

Though the exact location is never mentioned, the book's opening story takes place in a Nazi death camp during World War II. In the novella, we learn that Rosa comes from a well-educated and highly assimilated family of Polish Jews. Home to Europe's largest Jewish population prior to World War II, Poland served as a center of learning and culture for the Jewish community worldwide. After the Nazi invasion in 1939, all Jews were forced to live in restricted areas, known as ghettoes. Rosa recounts some of her experiences in the Warsaw ghetto. Despite a brave rebellion, most of the Jews detained in the Warsaw ghetto were eventually sent to Treblinka—an extermination camp fifty miles outside the city.

Discussion Activities

Copy and distribute Teacher's Guide Handout One, "Jewish Life in Pre-World War II Poland," Handout Two, "The Warsaw Ghetto," and the Reader's Guide essay, "The Holocaust." Divide your class into three groups. Assign each group an essay. Starting with "Jewish Life," ask groups to present what they learned to the class.

Using the adjectives collected for homework, what emotions are captured through Ozick's vivid language? Why is Magda like a "tiger"? Near the end of the story, we read about "green meadows" and "innocent tiger lilies." Does this glimpse to the green meadows imply hope or hopelessness for Rosa, Stella and Magda? Why would Ozick provide us with a glimpse of beauty before a horrific event takes place?

Writing Exercise

Ask your students to write a two-page essay considering whether or not a genocide such as the Holocaust can take place today. What, if any, responsibility would an average person bear? How can we, as a humane society, prevent or stop racial prejudice and genocide?

Homework

Read from page 13 until the break on page 39. Ask students to pay close attention to the way Rosa perceives her surroundings. What does she mean when she says, "Once I thought the worst was the worst, after that nothing could be the worst. But now I see, even after the worst there's still more"?

Lesson Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

The narrator tells the story with a specific perspective informed by his or her beliefs and experiences. The narrator can be a major or minor character. The narrator weaves her or his point of view, including ignorance and bias, into the telling of the tale. A first-person narrator participates in the events of the novel using "I." A distanced narrator (often not a character) does not participate in the events of the story and uses third person (he, she, they) to narrate the story. The distanced narrator can be omniscient, able to read the minds of all characters within the book. Ultimately, the type of narrator determines the point of view from which the story is told.

The Shawl employs a third-person narrative voice that does not participate in the story or novella's action, but has access to Rosa's private thoughts and feelings. Further, the narrator uses descriptive language and imagery that evoke Rosa's thoughts and moods. For instance, at the beginning of the novella, the narrator describes a "shrieking pulley," "squads of dying flies," and streets like a "furnace." Ozick uses these images in the narration to underscore how deeply memories of the Holocaust affect Rosa, even more than thirty years after the war's end.

Discussion Activities

Share the images mentioned above with your students. Ask them to find other instances where the narrator describes people, places, or things as if looking through Rosa's eyes with her unique personal history. Ask your students why Rosa feels that "even after the worst, there's still more." How does her perception of her surroundings feed into her despair?

Sometimes the narration is so closely aligned with Rosa's perspective it seems as if the book could have been written first-person. Why might Ozick have chosen to use such a close third-person point of view rather than writing in first-person from Rosa's viewpoint? Does third person offer any objectivity that might be lost if Rosa told her own story? Why or why not?

Writing Exercise

Ask your students to choose one character other than Rosa that has appeared so far. Have students rewrite a short scene of their choice from the first-person point of view of that character. Have volunteers read their scenes aloud to the class. What equips their character to tell the story? What does this character's point of view add to the story? What is lost?

Homework

Read from the break on page 39 to the break on page 53. Ask your students to pay close attention to the letter Stella sends Rosa. What do we learn about Stella?

Lesson Four

FOCUS: Characters

The main character in a work of literature is called the "protagonist." The protagonist often overcomes a weakness or ignorance to achieve a new understanding by the work's end. A protagonist who acts with great courage may be called a "hero." Readers often debate the virtues and motivations of the protagonists in the attempt to understand whether they are heroic. The protagonist's journey is made more dramatic by challenges presented by characters with different beliefs. A "foil" provokes the protagonist so as to highlight more clearly certain features of the main character. The most important foil, the "antagonist," is any character or force in a literary work that opposes the efforts of the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her success. The antagonist doesn't necessarily have to be a person. It could be nature, a social force, or an internal drive in the protagonist.

Discussion Activities

Rosa Lublin is the protagonist of *The Shawl*. Who or what is Rosa's most formidable antagonist? Discuss Stella's letter to Rosa (pp. 31-33). Is it reasonable for Stella to expect Rosa to move on with her life? Do your students find her letter cruel or helpful? Ask them to support their answers with passages from the text.

Simon Persky serves as a foil for Rosa. Copy and distribute Handout Three, "Jewish Immigration to the United States." Rosa repeatedly tells Persky, "My Warsaw isn't your Warsaw." What does she mean by this? Persky calls Rosa a refugee and she thinks of him as an immigrant. How do the circumstances under which Rosa and Persky came to the United States color their views of life and each other?

Although Magda dies in the first story, Rosa attempts to keep her alive through memory. Read Rosa's letter to Magda aloud (pp. 39-44). Discuss the life Rosa invents for Magda. What traits does Rosa give her daughter? Why might those traits be particularly important to Rosa? Do your students ever feel as if their own parents project unfulfilled desires onto them? How might Rosa be doing the same?

Writing Exercise

Rosa writes to Magda, "You have a legacy of choice, and they say choice is the only true freedom" (p. 43). What does Rosa mean when she tells Magda that choice is freedom? Does she live her life with this in mind? Ask your students to write three paragraphs considering whether choice is "the only true freedom."

Homework

Have students finish reading the book. Ask them to pay very close attention to the passage about the ghetto that begins with the last paragraph on page 67 and runs to the break on page 69.

Lesson Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

An author uses images, similes, metaphors and symbols to help the reader visualize and experience events and emotions contained within a story.

Cynthia Ozick believes figurative language is critical to understanding literature and uses it masterfully throughout *The Shawl*. In a 1998 *Atlantic Monthly* interview she said, "Just as you can't grasp anything without an opposable thumb, you can't write anything without the aid of metaphor. Metaphor is the mind's opposable thumb." In her essay "Metaphor and Memory" she writes, "Without the metaphor of memory and history, we cannot imagine the life of the Other. We cannot imagine what it is to be someone else. Metaphor is the reciprocal agent, the universalizing force: it makes possible the power to envision the stranger's heart."

Discussion Activities

Parables are metaphorical stories that use realistic characters and circumstances to make a point. They often carry a strong message that has meaning beyond its literal reading. Stella calls Rosa a "parable maker." In her last letter to Magda, Rosa recounts a story about a woman with a head of lettuce traveling through Warsaw on the tramcar. Read aloud from the last paragraph on page 67 to the break on page 69.

Rosa writes, "The most astounding thing was that the most ordinary streetcar, bumping along on the most ordinary trolley tracks, and carrying the most ordinary citizens going from one section of Warsaw to another, ran straight into the place of our misery. Every day, and several times a day, we had these witnesses" (p. 68). Ask your students why Poles traveling through the ghetto on the tramcar might have been unwilling to help the Jews. Do they believe people today would react differently? Why or why not?

What does Rosa mean when she writes, "And in this place now I am like the woman who held the lettuce in the tramcar. I said all this in my store, talking to the deaf"(p. 69)? Why would a head of lettuce be so important to Rosa? What lessons does the parable of the woman with the lettuce teach? Why is it important to Rosa that her story is heard?

Writing Exercise

Write Ozick's quotes on metaphor on the blackboard. Ask your students to write three paragraphs considering why Rosa refuses forget what happened during the Holocaust. Why does she feel she must tell others what happened? How does bearing witness to these events help Rosa cope with horrible memories of life in the Warsaw ghetto and the extermination camp?

Homework

Have students page through the book to find examples of objects that could be considered symbolic. Ask them to write two paragraphs about one of the book's symbols. How is the symbolic meaning different from the literal value of the object? How does this inform our understanding of the story or characters?

Lesson Six

FOCUS: Symbols

Symbols are interpretive keys to the text. The craft of storytelling depends on symbols that present ideas and point toward new meanings. Most frequently, a specific object will be used to reference (or symbolize) a more abstract concept. The repeated appearance of an object suggests a non-literal or figurative meaning attached to the object—above and beyond face value. Symbols are often found in the book's title, within a profound action, or captured by the name or personality of a character. The life of a book is perpetuated by generations of readers interpreting and re-interpreting the main symbols of the story.

Discussion Activities

In the book's opening story, Rosa swaddles her infant daughter Magda in a shawl to protect her and keep her warm. Throughout the rest of the book, the shawl represents different things to different characters. Ask your students to consider what the shawl meant to Magda, an infant barely clinging to life in an extermination camp. What did the shawl represent to fourteen-year-old Stella? To Rosa, a young mother? Why do your students think Rosa kept the shawl for more than thirty years? Over the years, did the shawl begin to represent something different to Rosa? If so, what? As an adult, how does Stella feel about the shawl? Are her feelings justifiable? Why or why not?

After her trip to the laundromat, Rosa notices a pair of her underwear is missing. Why is Rosa so upset by the loss? Ozick writes, "Because of the missing underwear, she had no dignity before him. She considered Persky's life: how trivial it must always have been: buttons, himself no more significant than a button. It was plain he took her to be another button like himself, battered and now out of fashion[. . .]" (p. 55). Ask your students to consider the reasons why losing such an intimate item might be especially upsetting to Rosa. Why was it particularly humiliating for Rosa to think Persky took them?

Writing Exercise

On the day Rosa and Persky meet, she is ashamed when Persky, a retired button manufacturer, notices her dress is missing a button. Later, when he visits her apartment and offers to take her to the library, Rosa is touched. "A thread of gratitude pulled in her throat. He almost understood what she was: no ordinary button" (p. 57). Ask your students to read that scene again and then write a two-page essay on what buttons symbolize to Rosa. How are the actual image and its symbolic value appropriate considering Rosa's background and history? Have your students support their ideas with passages from the text.

Homework

Ask your students to make a list of Rosa strengths and weaknesses. They should support each trait with a passage from the text.

Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Stories, novellas, and novels trace the development of characters that encounter a series of challenges. Most characters contain a complex balance of virtues and vices. Internal and external forces require characters to question themselves, overcome fears, or reconsider dreams. The protagonist undergoes profound change. A close study of character development maps the evolution of motivation, personality, and belief in each character. Still, the tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next, affecting the drama and the plot.

In *The Shawl*, Rosa struggles to survive in a world that seems to have forgotten the atrocities of the Holocaust. Rosa's life is defined by her need to bear witness to the cruelty she experienced, while Stella attempts to move past the horrors of the extermination camp. Rosa tells Persky, "Stella is self-indulgent. She wants to wipe out memory." Persky becomes the one person in Rosa's life who truly listens, and their continued friendship offers a bit of hope at the book's end.

Discussion Activities

Using their homework from the night before, ask your students to list some of Rosa's strengths and weaknesses on the blackboard. Talk about each of these traits while referring to the text. Have the students listed more good qualities or bad? Ask them if they find Rosa to be a sympathetic character. Do they consider her a heroic protagonist? Why or why not? Who or what serves as an antagonist to Rosa? What do we learn about her character from these forces of conflict?

Persky provides comic relief during what is otherwise a very serious work of fiction. What do we learn about Persky's and Rosa's personalities during their banter? How does Persky use humor to gain Rosa's trust? Both Persky and Stella suggest that Rosa should forget about her life in Poland. Why might Rosa listen to Persky when she cannot bear to have Stella tell her to move on with life?

Writing Exercise

Many Polish citizens were highly assimilated Jews. Until Hitler's Holocaust, they did not necessarily consider their religion to be their primary identification. Ask your students to write a two-page essay on the character that best assimilates to American culture. Does the need to assimilate to American culture deepen or cure the wounds left from the war? Have students support their thesis with passages from the text.

Homework

Have students page through the book and identify three major turning points.

Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author artfully builds a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and inform character development. The timing of events from beginning to middle to end can make a book predictable or riveting. A plot, propelled by a crisis, will reach a climax, and close with a resolution (sometimes called dénouement). Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy time while telling the story. A successful author will keep a reader entranced by clever pacing built within the tale, sometimes confounding a simple plot by telling stories within stories.

The events that took place in the Warsaw ghetto and the extermination camp shape the way Rosa views herself and others. Convinced that Persky has violated her trust by taking her underpants, Rosa calls him a thief. The next morning she finds them inside a towel. Immediately afterward, she goes downstairs to talk to the receptionist about having her phone reconnected. The long-awaited package from Stella is there but, rather than excitement, Rosa initially feels indifferent when she sees the colorless cloth laying in the box. During a phone call to Stella, Magda comes alive in Rosa's imagination just long enough for Rosa to write her the story of the woman with the lettuce. Magda slips away when the phone rings. The receptionist announces that Persky is downstairs waiting for Rosa.

Discussion Activities

Ask your students to identify several major turning points in the book. Discuss these turning points with the class. Ask your class to consider what we learn about Rosa at each of these moments. Do they feel Rosa changes during the course of the book? If so, in what ways does she change? If not, what prevents a transformation? What, if any, signs of hope occur in the book's last passages?

Map a timeline that depicts the dramatic build-up in the book. Do your students feel that Magda's death in the first story causes the rest of the book to be anticlimactic? Why or why not?

Writing Exercise

Outline a sequel to *The Shawl*. Write a few paragraphs of the sequel's opening scene. What happens after Persky comes up to Rosa's room? Do they continue their friendship? Does Rosa ever reconcile with Stella?

Homework

Ask your students to identify three major themes in the book.

Lesson Nine

FOCUS: Themes of the Book

Profound questions raised by the story allow the character (and the reader) to explore the meaning of human life and extract themes. Themes investigate topics explored for centuries by philosophers, politicians, scientists, historians, and theologians. Classic themes include intellectual freedom versus censorship, personal moral code in relation to political justice, and spiritual faith versus rational commitments. A work of fiction can shed light on these age-old debates by creating new situations to challenge and explore human nature.

Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise

Use the following questions to stimulate discussion or provide writing exercises in order to interpret the book in specific ways. Using historical references to support ideas, explore the statements *The Shawl* makes about the following themes and the themes your students identify during their reading of the book:

Memory/History

Rosa writes to Magda, "When I had my store, I used to 'meet the public,' and I wanted to tell everybody—not only our story, but other stories as well. Nobody knew anything. This amazed me, that nobody remembered what happened only a little while ago" (p. 66).

Why does Rosa feel compelled to tell her story to people who do not want to hear it? What does she hope to accomplish? Do people have a responsibility to study history? Why or why not?

Dignity

Rosa often feels ashamed. Discuss instances that cause Rosa embarrassment. Why do these events cause such profound pain? Refer again to the passage on pages 53-61. What does Rosa mean when she says she is "no ordinary button"? How might it have been important NOT to be ordinary while trying to survive in a death camp? Does the desire to be something special influence Rosa in positive ways or negative ones? Support your answers with references to the text.

Life

Rosa tells Persky that people have three lives—"the life before, the life during, and the life after." Discuss Rosa's three lives. Which is the most important to her? Does Rosa have the power to change "the life after?" Why or why not?

Homework

Ask students to begin their essays using the Essay Topics in this guide. Outlines are due the next class period.

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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Great Book?

Works of fiction can illustrate the connections between individuals and questions of humanity. Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives, while painting those conflicts in the larger picture of human struggle. Readers forge bonds with the story as the writer's voice, style, and sense of poetry inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities for learning, imagining, and reflecting, a great book is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changing lives, challenging assumptions, and breaking new ground.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Write these on the board. What elevates a work of fiction to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of these characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *The Shawl*? Is this a great book?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Cynthia Ozick create in *The Shawl*? Does this story speak about more than one woman's personal trauma? What can we learn about the importance of memory and history from reading this book? Human dignity? The will to live?

Divide students into groups and have each group determine the single most important theme of the book. Have a spokesperson from each group explain the group's decision, with references from the text. Write these themes on the board. Do all the groups agree?

Writing Exercise

Ask students to write a letter to a friend, perhaps one who does not like to read, explaining why *The Shawl* is a good book. The student should make an argument that explains why this book has meaning for all people, even those who have no interest in other times or other places.

Homework

Students will finish their essays.

Essay Topics

The discussion activities and writing exercises in this guide provide you with possible essay topics, as do the Discussion Questions in the Reader's Guide. Advanced students can come up with their own essay topics, as long as they are specific and compelling. Other ideas for essays are provided here.

For essays, students should organize their ideas around a thesis about the book. This statement or thesis should be focused, with clear reasons supporting its conclusion. The thesis and supporting reasons should be backed by references to the text.

1. Several times over the course of the novella, we find statements very much like this one: "Without a life, a person lives where they can. If all they got is thoughts, that's where they live" (pp. 27-28). After all Rosa has lost, is she justified in separating herself from life? Why or why not? Do Stella or Persky offer better examples of how to live after experiencing disappointment or trauma?

2. Should Stella feel responsible for Magda's death? What sort of person is Stella as an adult? Why does Rosa feel she is cold and self-indulgent? Are Rosa's attitudes toward Stella justified? Why or why not? How would you characterize Stella's feelings for Rosa?

3. Stella believes Magda to be the product of Rosa's rape by a Nazi soldier but Rosa insists she conceived the baby with Andrzej, her pre-war fiancé. Who do you believe? If Stella is right, why would Rosa make up such and elaborate history for Magda? Why would she have chosen to give her daughter both a Jewish and a Christian heritage? Do you find it surprising that Rosa imagines an American life for Magda? Why or why not?

4. Why is Rosa so offended by Dr. Tree's letter? Why does she resist the terms "survivor" and "refugee" but embrace simply being called a human being? Does this attitude seem at odds with her desire not to be "an ordinary button"? Does being called a "human being" bear witness to the events Rosa experienced in the ghetto and death camp? Why or why not? Why has Ozick chosen to include the scholar, Dr. Tree? Why has she chosen a scholar in "clinical social pathology" and not a Holocaust historian? Is Ozick making a statement about scholarly interest in human tragedy?

5. What does Rosa mean when she tells Persky, "My Warsaw is not your Warsaw?" What does Rosa imagine his family was like? What evidence is there that she is correct? How do Persky's views about life in America differ from Rosa's? Why do they differ?

Capstone Projects

Teachers may consider the ways in which these activities may be linked to other Big Read community events. Most of these projects could be shared at a local library, a student assembly, or a bookstore.

1. Have the students create a photo gallery of Warsaw before, during, and after World War II. If possible, try to include scenes and persons reflective of the *The Shawl*: a home of a well-to-do family, a synagogue, Nazi soldiers, the Warsaw ghetto, and so on. Display the gallery in the classroom or school library.

2. Show your class the DVD of *Schindler's List*. Following the screening, lead a class discussion to explore the accuracy of the portrayals of the movie and *The Shawl*, in both detail and spirit.

3. Ask your class to collect various buttons. After your class has collected as many buttons as they can, create a display. More than six million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. Calculate how many lives each button collected would have to represent. Display your collection along with photos and stories of those who perished in the extermination camps. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (www.ushmm.org) is a good resource for the photos and stories.

4. Ozick turned *The Shawl* into a play by the same name. Work with a theater teaching-artist to have student adapt scenes from the novel. Student-writers might learn to direct their adaptation with the assistance of a teaching-artist. Other students might create stage sets for each scene. Perform these scenes at a school assembly or Big Read event. Or, have students from the theater club perform adaptations.

5. Have the students draw a series of portraits of Rosa Lublin at various stages of her life: the happy child; the enthusiastic student; the protective mother; the young woman whose world has been destroyed; the older woman troubled by society's ability to forget so easily. Display these Stages of a Life in the classroom.

Jewish Life in Pre-World War II Poland

For centuries Jews from all over the world sought refuge in Poland, located in eastern Europe between Germany and the former Soviet Union. The first large migration of Jews began during the Crusades, in the late 11th and early 12th centuries. Encouraged by the religious tolerance they found, Jewish families settled, established communities, and eventually became the cornerstone of the Polish economy.

The 12th through 20th centuries were punctuated by periods of anti-Semitism fueled by xenophobia and envy of the Jews' perceived control of the economy. Still, compared with much of Europe, Poland remained relatively tolerant. According to the 1931 census, more than three million Jews lived in Poland—Europe's largest Jewish population. Newspapers appeared in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish. Jewish schools—both religious and secular—promoted scholarship and intellectual debate that influenced the Jewish community worldwide.

Jewish life and culture especially thrived in Warsaw, the country's capital city. A beautiful metropolis bisected by the Vistula River, Warsaw housed the world's second largest Jewish community after New York City. Before World War II began, Jews comprised nearly thirty percent of the city's population. The largest and most beautiful synagogue in Warsaw was known as the "Great Synagogue" in Tlomackie Square. It held more than two thousand people and had meeting rooms, a library, an archive, and a *heder* (school).

Though some Jews maintained their own religious and cultural traditions, other families were highly assimilated. They identified themselves first as Polish citizens and only secondly by religion. They conducted their lives just as any other Polish citizen and a person passing on the street would not have known they were Jewish.

Poland's central location and large Jewish population made it a target of the Nazi regime. German troops invaded Poland in September 1939. The Nazis immediately placed heavy restrictions on Jews. Jewish businesses were required to display the Star of David as a symbol of Jewish identity. Jews could not have bank accounts, hold large amounts of money, or work in the textile or leather trades. By November 1939, the Nazis required all Jews to wear a blue armband with the Star of David. The Nazi regime closed Jewish schools, confiscated Jewish property, and forced Jewish citizens into labor camps. Jews could not own radios, attend movies, enter a post office, or mail letters overseas. In October 1940, the Nazis degreed that all Jews in Warsaw must move to a sealed-off area that came to be known as the "Warsaw Ghetto."

The Warsaw Ghetto

During World War II, the Germans established ghettos throughout Europe that separated Jews from the rest of the population and isolated Jewish communities from each other. This allowed Nazis to maintain control and arrange deportations to forced labor, concentration, and extermination camps. In October 1940, just over a year after Germany invaded Poland, the Nazi regime required all Warsaw's Jewish citizens and those from nearby towns to move to a designated area. This area, sealed off from the rest of the city, eventually held over 400,000 people—more than a third of the local population—but comprised less than five percent of Warsaw's land area.

The Nazis established a Judenrat (Jewish Council) to uphold order inside the ghetto. The Judenrat did not know the Reich's ultimate plan demanded the complete extermination of all European Jews. They cooperated with the Nazis in vain hope of saving lives. Jewish council members who refused to cooperate were often killed or transported to one of the camps.

Food allotments rationed by the German authorities were not enough to sustain life. As a result, a black market developed. Countless Jews sold their few remaining possessions in order to purchase food or medicine. Between 1940 and 1942 nearly 100,000 people died of illness and starvation while living inside the Warsaw Ghetto.

At the Wannsee Conference in January 1942, the Nazis decided on what they called "The Final Solution," the systematic murder of all Jews living within the Reich. They established extermination camps with specialized gas chambers capable of killing large numbers of people. From July until October 1942, the Nazis sent more than 300,000 Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka, an extermination camp in a sparsely populated area fifty miles outside of Warsaw. Information trickled back to the ghetto about what was taking place there.

Several Jewish resistance groups decided to fight back with smuggled guns and homemade weapons. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was the largest and most important opposition effort organized by the Jewish resistance during World War II. On April 19, 1943, the ghetto fighters opened fire on German SS and police when they attempted to deport the remaining Warsaw Jews.

Despite being vastly outnumbered and short of weapons, the ghetto fighters inflicted heavy casualties in the first days of the battle. Germans began burning the ghetto building by building to flush out the fighters. They regained control of the ghetto and, on May 16, 1943, German General Jurgen Stroop ordered the destruction of the Great Synagogue on Tlomackie Street as a symbol of German victory. The 56,000 Jews that remained in Warsaw were either shot or transported to extermination camps.

Jewish Immigration to the United States

Anti-Semitism, overpopulation, and racial discrimination prompted many Jews to leave Eastern Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Between 1880 and 1924, when the United States adopted immigration restrictions, more than two millions Jews came to America. Many of these immigrants were unskilled laborers, struggling to learn English. Enticed by freedom and opportunity, they primarily settled in large cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago and found work in factories, manufacturing, and construction. This wave of immigrants embraced the American experience and made the country their new home. By the turn of the century, most major cities in the United States had thriving Jewish communities.

As Jews assimilated to the United States they made significant contributions to the country's intellectual and cultural life. In *The Shawl*, Simon Persky brags that film legend Lauren Bacall (born Betty Joan Perske to Jewish immigrant parents) is his cousin. Broadway composer Irving Berlin, magician Harry Houdini, and science fiction writer Isaac Asimov all came to America as children, part of the vast wave of European Jewish immigrants. Like Simon Persky, they found an America full of opportunity and embraced the American dream.

However, after World War I attitudes toward immigration began to change. Congress passed a series of laws to limit the flow of immigrants. During the Holocaust, obtaining a visa became an issue of life and death. The United States, like many countries, initially refused to allow Jewish refugees and stood silent while millions of Jews died at the hands of the Nazi regime.

Just before the outbreak of World War II on May 13, 1939, the St. Louis sailed from Hamburg to Havana, Cuba. Almost all the passengers were Jews fleeing Nazi anti-Seminitism. Most applied for U.S. visas and planned to stay in Cuba only until they could enter the United States. Ultimately, Cuba did not allow the ship to dock. The passengers on board were stranded. The United States government was aware of the situation and had been asked to allow the refugees safe haven. The government refused, and most of the passengers were sent back to Europe just as World War II began.

Nearly five years later in January 1944 the Roosevelt Administration, faced with undeniable evidence of what was taking place in the Nazi extermination camps, formed the War Refugee Board. An executive order established a new policy that promised "to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death and otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war." This directive created a safe haven for many Jewish Holocaust survivors.

Though many refugees embraced the opportunities provided in America, Rosa Lublin represents the feelings of refugees—Jewish and non-Jewish—who never desired to leave their home countries and who did so only under duress. Rosa longs for the security, comfort, and familiarity of her native Poland even as she realizes that it's the product of a past life, a life stolen from her by the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Teaching Resources

Books

Bachrach, Susan D. *Tell Them We Remember: The Story of the Holocaust.* Boston: Little, Brown, 1994.
The Holocaust as presented in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and illustrated with historical photographs. Sidebars tell the personal stories of more than 20 young people who suffered or died during the Holocaust.

Landau, Elaine. *The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.* New York: Macmillan, 1992.
After briefly describing the creation of the Warsaw ghetto, the author concentrates on the 28 days of the uprising.

Meltzer, Milton. *Never to Forget : The Jews of the Holocaust.* New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1977.
One of the first books on the Holocaust written for young people.

Weisel, Elie. *Night.* 1972. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006.
Elie Weisel's haunting account of surviving the Holocaust as a young man.

Web sites

http://www.ushmm.org
The web site of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum offers educational material, photo archives, interviews with survivors, and more.

http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/timeline/timeline.htm
"A Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust" produced by the Florida Center for Instructional Technology, College of Education, University of South Florida.

http://www1.yadvashem.org.il/exhibitions/warsaw_ghetto/home_warsaw.html
The site contains photographs taken in the Warsaw Ghetto and offers scholarly analysis and brief captions for each photograph.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/camp/
"Memory of the Camps," a production of PBS that incorporates footage from the liberation of a death camp, is one of the most definitive and unforgettable records of the Holocaust.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/holocaust
This is a companion site to the PBS documentary on America's response to the Holocaust. It includes a timeline of events, transcripts from the broadcast, eyewitness interviews, scanned images of original documents, maps, photographs, and a teacher's guide.

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards*

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

* This guide was developed with NCTE Standards and State Language Arts Standards in mind. Use these standards to guide and develop your application of the curriculum.

"Just as you can't grasp anything without an opposable thumb, you can't write anything without the aid of metaphor. Metaphor is the mind's opposable thumb."

—CYNTHIA OZICK

"It was a magic shawl, it could nourish an infant for three days and three nights."

—CYNTHIA OZICK

from *The Shawl*

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

THE BIG READ

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents The Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

A great nation deserves great art.

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